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(54) **Laser diode automatic power control circuit with means of protection of the laser diode**

Automatische Leistungssteuerungsschaltung mit Schutzvorrichtung für eine Laserdiode

Alimentation pour laser à diode à contrôle automatique avec possibilité de protection du laser

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- REVIEW OF SCIENTIFIC INSTRUMENTS. vol. 60, no. 9, September 1989, NEW YORK US pages 2896 - 2901 M.S. CAFFERTY ET AL 'Stable current supply with protection circuits for lead-salt laser diode'
- PATENT ABSTRACTS OF JAPAN vol. 10, no. 74 (P-439)25 March 1986 & JP-A-60 212 833 (SONY KK)

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Description

This invention relates in general to laser diodes and, more particularly, to an automatic power control circuit with means of protecting the laser diode from transient voltage or current spikes on power up and power down conditions.

The laser diode has been used frequently as a light source in a variety of photographic applications. For example, in the field of laser printing, a laser beam is focused through a lens and then scanned onto a photo-sensitive medium, such as film. The laser diode is often controlled by digital data stored in a computer. Image quality may be improved by forming an image from pixels having varying gray tones to form a continuous tone image in film. The continuous tone radiographic laser printer is one application in which a laser diode is used to expose radiographic film to electronic images produced by medical imaging modalities, such as computed tomography, magnetic resonance imaging, digital subtraction angiography, ultrasonic imaging, and the like.

A problem with laser diodes is that the illuminative output of a semiconductor laser diode is not linear across its entire operating range. More specifically, as shown in FIG. 11 (which is a typical graph of light output P of a laser diode as a function of current I), the resulting curve has a lower level non-linear operating region joined by a knee region to a higher level operating region where light output varies linearly as a function of input signal value. The linear region is known as the lasing region and the non-linear lower level region is known as the light emitting or spontaneous emission region. The curve includes (1) a lower portion between 0 and the knee current I_k where the resulting optical power output P_d varies in a non-linear manner as current I_d changes, and (2) a second higher portion between I_k and I_{max} where optical power output varies linearly with changes in current I_d . Because the non-linear region is unsatisfactory for generating a continuous tone image in response to image input signal levels, it is desirable that the laser output range be limited to the linear operating region. It is thus common practice to operate a laser diode at or above a predetermined current level called a threshold current.

Problems arise in automatically setting and maintaining a constant laser output power. Other problems arise in protecting the laser diode from overpower, over and under temperature and transient voltage or current spikes on power up and down conditions. US-A-4,507,767, discloses an optical disk device including a laser diode as a light source which includes a protection circuit in parallel with the semi-conductor laser, in which the protection circuit is put in a short-circuited state between two terminals thereof, when a monitor signal corresponding to the light output of the semi-conductor laser exceeds a predetermined value. There is no disclosure in this patent of protection of the semi-conductor

laser diode due to under or over temperature conditions, or power on and power off voltage and current spikes.

US-A-4,872,080, discloses a protective circuit for a semi-conductor laser supplied with an excitation current by a current generator circuit. The protective circuit includes a transducer whose output is controlled by the laser light, a limit circuit cooperating with the transducer and a current shunt circuit energized by the limit circuit and switched in parallel with the semi-conductor laser.

Once the permissible emitted light power is reached, excessive excitation current is diverted to the shunt circuit. There is no disclosure in this patent of protecting the laser diode from over or under temperature conditions, among other problems.

US-A-4,791,636 discloses a semi-conductor laser comprising a laser oscillating optical waveguide composed of a control region which functions to absorb light and main regions which function to oscillate laser light, wherein the laser device includes a shunting means by which the ratio of the current flowing to the control region to the total current injected into the laser device is set according to a predetermined algorithm.

US-A-4,074,334, discloses a protective device for limiting the current flow through a power transistor, a normally nonconductive shunt transistor is turned on to shunt current around the power transistor when collector current and collector-emitter voltage exceed a selected current/voltage curve. There is no monitoring disclosed in this patent of over or under temperature conditions.

The following U.S. Patents disclose various laser diode control techniques which do not sufficiently solve the problems of automatic power control and protection of a laser diode: US-A-5,019,769; U.S. Statutory Invention Registration No. H322; US-A-4,890,288; US-A-4,501,022; and US-A-4,612,671.

Review of Scientific Instruments, vol.60, no.9, September 1989, p.2896-2901, describes a stable current supply with protection circuits for a lead-salt laser diode.

According to the present invention, there is provided a solution to the problems of the prior art relating to automatic power control and protection of a laser diode. According to an embodiment of the present invention, a laser diode automatic power control circuit includes means for protecting the laser diode from over power conditions, over and under temperature conditions and transient voltage or current spikes on power up and down conditions. The laser imaging apparatus of the present invention is defined in claim 1. Embodiments are set out in the dependent claims.

In a detailed description of the preferred embodiments of the invention presented below, reference is made to the accompanying drawings in which like numerals refer to like elements.

FIGS. 1-10 are schematic electrical diagrams illustrating an embodiment of the present invention.

FIG. 11 is a graph of a laser diode operating curve in which illuminative output power P is a function of cur-

rent I through the laser diode.

FIG. 12 is a simplified block diagram of an imaging system incorporating a laser diode and an embodiment of the control circuit of the present invention.

Referring now to FIG. 12, there is shown a medical imaging system incorporating an embodiment of the present invention. As shown, system 110 includes a source of a digital medical diagnostic image such as is produced by medical imaging modality 112. Modality 112 may, for example, be a diagnostic imaging modality such as computed tomography modality, magnetic resonance imaging modality, ultrasound modality, digital subtraction angiography modality, nuclear medicine modality, or the like. The digital image can also be produced from a storage phosphor, a digitized radiograph or from a digital image archive or storage system. The image produced by modality 112 is digitized and stored in image storage/processor 114. The digital image can be stored in a magnetic or optical disk drive provided in processor 114. The digital image can also be processed by well-known techniques, such as window width-level, tonal gradation, interpolation, edge enhancement, or the like.

A hard copy of the digital image is produced on photosensitive media 116 by means of a laser diode 118 which is controlled by laser control circuit 120, according to the present invention. The laser beam 22 produced by laser diode 118 is shaped and then scanned across media 116 by means of scan optics 124 to produce an image of the digital image on photosensitive media 116 which may, for example, be film, paper or the like. The media 116 is processed to produce a fixed image.

System 110 includes system controller 126, such as a microprocessor which controls processor 114, laser control circuit 120, laser diode 118, and scan optics 124.

Refer to FIG. 1 for an overview of an embodiment of the present invention, the function of which is to set and maintain a constant laser output power and to protect the laser diode. The output device 1, is a semiconductor laser diode. The laser output power is monitored by back facet photodiode 2 which monitors the power on the back facet of the laser diode 1. The temperature of the laser diode 1 is monitored by a thermistor 3 which is mounted on a hybrid.

The current in laser diode 1 is sourced from voltage controlled current source 4. Input voltages to control the voltage controlled current source 4 are sourced from the summing amplifier (amp) 5. The summing amp 5 has inputs from transimpedance amps 6, 7 and 11. Transimpedance amp 6 converts the current output of the back facet photodiode 2 to a voltage. Transimpedance amp 7 converts the current output of threshold DAC 8 (the threshold Digital to Analog Converter) to a voltage. Transimpedance amp 8 converts the current output of linear DAC 12 (the linear Digital to Analog Converter) to a voltage.

Operation of the circuit begins by auto-thresholding, which is a means to automatically bring the laser power

to a threshold level.

As will be described later, the threshold level is not the same as that defined by laser diode manufacturers, but is a level at which the laser power output functional dependence upon laser current is linear. The auto-threshold sequence is enabled by bringing the digital signal \sim LIN_THR_SEL 17 (linear threshold mode select) high. This enables the threshold clock, which clocks counters to increment from an initial value of 000 (hex). These counters output twelve bit data 27 to threshold dac 8. This in turn is converted to a voltage level by transimpedance amp 7. Analog signal THR_DAC 20, which is the output of the transimpedance amp 7, is input to summing amp 5, which drives voltage controlled current source 4, which sinks current from the laser diode 1. The laser at threshold detector 10 monitors the laser power, and when a preset laser threshold power is reached causes the digital signal \sim LAS_AT_THR 22 to go low, which stops the threshold clock and counter circuit 9 from incrementing the twelve bit data 27. The laser diode 1 is left at a power level above which the laser output power functional dependence upon laser current is linear.

Twelve bit data LINEAR_DAC 18 controls the laser output power from the threshold power to the maximum laser power. Twelve bit data LINEAR_DAC 18 is input to linear dac 12. This, in turn, is converted to a voltage level by transimpedance amp 11. Analog signal LIN_DAC 21, which is the output of the transimpedance amp 11, is input to summing amp 5, which drives voltage controlled current source 4, which sinks current from the laser diode 1. The laser overpower detector 13 monitors the laser power. When a preset laser power is reached, the digital signal \sim LAS_OVERPOWER 23 is caused to go low, which protects the laser diode 1 by shunting current around the laser, as discussed later.

Negative feedback is used to stabilize the power output of the laser diode 1. This loop consists of the laser diode 1, back facet photodiode 2, transimpedance amp 6, summing amp 5, and voltage controlled current source 4. Functionally, this feedback loop stabilizes the laser diode against variations in laser slope efficiency (change in output optical power per unit current change), and laser threshold current (current at which the laser becomes single mode).

The slope efficiency and threshold current vary as a function of aging of the laser diode and temperature of the laser. Additionally, when this loop is closed, it desensitizes the summing amp 5 response to analog signals THR_DAC 20 and LIN_DAC 21.

Refer to FIG. 1 for the following discussion of protection of laser diode 1. The purpose of the protection circuit, according to the present invention, is to provide a means to protect the laser diode 1 from transient voltage or current spikes on power up and power down conditions.

The means to protect the laser diode 1 is to shunt the current from the laser diode 1 through a low imped-

ance switch 14, which is a Field Effect Transistor with, for example, less than a 0.5 ohm channel resistance. Shunting the current in such a manner is referred to as placing a crowbar across the laser diode 1.

The power supply monitor 16 monitors the power supply voltage. As will be described later, the power for automatic power control is conditioned by a power sequencing circuit 130. Circuit 130 turns on the negative power supply voltage prior to the positive power supply voltage, and turns off the positive power supply voltage before the negative power supply voltage, when a voltage change (for example, 2 volts) in the difference between positive and negative power supply voltage is detected. This allows the power monitor 16 to only monitor the positive power supply voltage. An additional benefit of the power sequencing circuit is that the crowbar switch circuit 14, which uses only negative power supply voltage, is energized and operational before the laser drive circuitry is sufficiently energized to drive current through the laser diode. A power-on reset circuit asserts the digital signal ~SLOW_START 21 low, and holds it low for 1 second after the positive power supply voltage comes on. This places the crowbar switch 14 across the laser diode 1 and insures that the laser diode 1 is protected from power-on transients. When the positive power supply voltage drops (for example, 10%) from its normal 12 volt value the digital signal ~PWR_RESET 26 is asserted low, which places the crowbar switch 14 across the laser diode 1 and insures that the laser diode 1 is protected from power down transients. A power hold circuit keeps the crowbar switch 14 activated and shunting the laser diode for a short period (for example, 1.4 seconds) after power is removed from the circuit.

The laser temperature monitor 15 uses thermistor 3 to sense laser temperature. If the temperature is out (either over or under temperature) of a preset temperature window centered at 25°C, the digital signal -LASER_OUT_TEMP 24 is asserted low which places the crowbar switch 14 across the laser diode 1 and insures that the laser diode 1 is protected from high temperature and possible thermal runaway conditions. A runaway condition occurs when there is a rise in temperature of integrally packaged laser diode 1 and integral photodiode 2. Such a temperature rise reduces the efficiency of the photodiode 2 and, subsequently, the current output of photodiode 2. The automatic power control circuit senses this as a drop in laser power and increases the laser current. The laser output efficiency is reduced at elevated temperatures, and the added current will further elevate that temperature reducing the efficiency further of both the laser diode 1 and photodiode 2. This cycle of thermal runaway can result in damage and failure of the laser diode 1.

The laser overpower detector 13 senses when the laser power exceeds a preset limit which is less than the maximum operational power of the laser diode 1. When the overpower condition occurs, the digital signal -LASER_OVERPOWER 23 is asserted low. This places

the crowbar switch 14 across the laser diode 1 and insures that the laser diode 1 is protected from reaching a power level which could result in damage and failure.

Following is a more detailed description of the automatic power control (APC) and laser protection circuit of an embodiment of the present invention:

LASER DIODE 1 AND BACK FACET PHOTODIODE 2

10 The laser diode 1 can, for example, be a 5 mW, 670 nm laser diode. These diodes are much more susceptible to damage from transients than other laser diodes (for example, infrared laser diodes), and require more detailed protection schemes.

15 Integral to the laser diode 1 is a photodiode 2, which monitors light output from the back facet of the laser diode 1.

THERMISTOR 3

20 The temperature of the laser is monitored by a thermistor 3 which is preferably mounted on a hybrid. The thermistor 3 consists of three squares of thermistor ink. The ink squares are electrically in series and are silk screened upon a ceramic substrate using thick film hybrid technology. The thermistors are in series with a fixed resistor which is used to trim the total resistance to 5K. The hybrid also has the laser diode 1 mounted upon it and places the thermistors in direct contact with the laser diode case for efficient thermal monitoring of laser diode 1.

VOLTAGE CONTROLLED CURRENT SOURCE 4 AND SUMMING AMP 5

25 FIG. 2 shows the voltage controlled current source 4 which, for example, is an n channel enhancement mode FET type transistor 28. The voltage from gate to source, or V_{GS} , controls the current output of the FET 28. The voltage at the gate of transistor 28 is set by the output of summing operational amp 29, and the amp 29 senses the voltage at the top of resistor 30.

30 At start up, the only input to the summing operational amp 23 summing node 31 is the VIO_REF signal 32, which is adjusted to establish no voltage drop across the resistor 30, and thus no current through the current source FET. VIO_REF 32 provides a means to null out any input offset voltage effects from the various inputs to the summing operational amp 29, in addition to establishing a negative voltage, such as -8.1 volts, at the junction between FET 28 and resistor 30 to set the current output to 0 mA.

35 The THR_DAC 20 input to the summing operational amp 29 summing node 31 is used to bring the laser power of laser diode 1 to a threshold level, for example, of 0.5 mW. The LIN_DAC 21 input to the summing operational amp 29 summing node 31 is used to vary the laser power, for example, between 0.5 and 4.5 mW.

APC_FEEDBACK 33 is used to stabilize the laser power and its sources from the photodiode 2 transimpedance amp 6 in FIG. 1.

CROWBAR SWITCH 14 AND POWER MONITOR

FIG. 2 further shows the detail of FIG. 1's crowbar switch 14, which is a p channel enhancement mode FET type transistor 34. In the example described, the gate of FET 34 must be 2 volts lower than the source 4 which is at ground potential for the transistor 34 to be on, or the crowbar switch 14 to be closed.

A power hold circuit 35, used to hold power to the crowbar switch 14 on power down, consists of diode 36, resistor 37, diode 38, resistor 39, capacitor 40, resistor 41 and diode 42. On power up, capacitor 40 is charged through current path resistor 39, diode 38 and diode 36. A power sequencer circuit 130 (FIG. 10) insures that $V_{BB} = -12$ volts is active prior to $V_{DD} = +12$ volts. This allows capacitor 40 to be fully charged. On power down, diode 36 becomes reversed biased, isolating the crowbar node 43 from V_{BB} as it drops to 0 volts, and connecting it to capacitor 40. The capacitor 40 is slowly discharged through the path resistor 41, diode 42 and resistor 44 to ground. This insures that the crowbar switch 14 shunts laser current for 1.5 seconds after power drops, and protects the laser from any power down transients.

FIG. 3 shows the crowbar drive circuit 45. This circuit 45 was designed to be operational as power is coming up. When \sim CROWBAR 46 is high impedance, and $V_{BB} = -12$ volts then in FIG. 2, the gate to source voltage of FET 34 is -11.3 volts. FET 34 is turned on and the laser current is shunted by the crowbar FET 34. In the crowbar drive circuit 45 shown in FIG. 3, the output of gate 48 drives the base of transistor 49 and switches the output of transistor 49 between high impedance or the LPM_5V_REF 50, a 5 volt reference. If the output of gate 48 is equal to or less than 0.7 volts different from LPM_5V_REF 50, then transistor 49 is shut off, and its output is in a high impedance state. Gate 48 is driven high by signal \sim BRD_RESET 19 and \sim SLOW_START 25 on power up. \sim SLOW_START 25 remains low for 0.5 seconds after $V_{DD} = 12$ volts. Gates 48 and 51 are preferably FACT technology, which is operational at as little as 2.0 volts, and is guaranteed to have outputs within .1 volt of the supply voltage for a high signal. Gate 48 is powered by LPM_5V_REF 50, and as such keeps the base to emitter voltage on transistor 49 at -0.1 volts, which is much less than the required 0.7 volts to turn transistor 49 on, and thus keeps the emitter of transistor 49 in the high impedance state.

Power supply monitor circuit 16, FIG. 3, monitors the positive power supply V_{DD} and produces signals \sim SLOW_START 25 and \sim PWR_RESET 26. Monitor circuit 16 has a divider network including transistor 52 having a base connected to the junction of resistors 53 and 54 between V_{DD} and ground, a collector connected

by resistor 55 to V_{DD} and an emitter connected by resistor 56 to ground. Resistor 61 and capacitor 57 form a delay circuit for sensing circuit 59. Undervoltage sensing circuits 59 and 60 respectively sense whether V_{DD} voltage is over a predetermined value. For a preset delay determined by the time constant of 61,57 circuit 59 senses an under voltage, it produces \sim SLOW_START signal. When circuit 60 senses an under voltage, it produces signal \sim PWR_RESET through D flip-flop 47 with no delay. Both of these signals actuate crowbar switch 14. Circuit 59 is used to crowbar the laser on power up with a delay. Circuit 60 is used to rapidly detect power V_{DD} falling and crowbar the laser on power down.

After power is stable for plus 0.5 seconds, \sim SLOW_START 25 goes high. \sim BRD_RESET 19 must be released by software to remove the crowbar shunt and allow the laser diode 1 to operate. Other signals which, when asserted (low), cause the laser current to be shunted by the crowbar FET 34 are: \sim LASER_OUT_TEMP 24, \sim PWR_RESET 26, AND \sim LASER_OVERPOWER 23. \sim LASER_OUT-TEMP 24 is asserted when the laser diode 1 has a temperature which is determined to be either above or below a desirable temperature range. An above temperature condition leads to degradation of the laser diode, and below temperature can cause condensation upon the laser. A below temperature condition can indicate a broken connection to the thermistor which, with a negative temperature coefficient, can cause heating of the laser and lead to thermal run away and destruction of the laser diode. \sim POWER_RESET 26 is asserted when the positive power supply V_{DD} drops 10% below 12 volts. This crowbars the laser. \sim LASER_OVERPOWER is asserted when the current feedback from the photodiode indicates the laser power is above a preset maximum power level.

THRESHOLD OPERATION

Refer to FIGS. 1, 5 and 6. The threshold clock 70 includes a timer 71 (such as an NE555), which is enabled by all three signals \sim LAS_AT_THR 22, \sim SLOW_START_25, and \sim LIN_THR_SEL 17 being in the high state. In normal operation, \sim SLOW_START 25 is low for 1 second after power is stabilized, \sim LAS_AT_THR 22 and \sim LIN_THR_SEL 17 are set high by hardware on power up. When software writes \sim LIN_THR_SEL 17 high, the threshold clock 70 is enabled to oscillate, until the laser diode 1 at threshold condition is reached and signal \sim LAS_AT_THR 22 is asserted low inhibiting the threshold clock.

The threshold clock 70 clocks the threshold counter 72, which is initially cleared on power up and then counts from 000 to FFF(hex) until inhibited by the assertion of \sim LAS_AT_THR 22 low. Counter 72 can be, for example, a 12 bit counter including cascaded 4 bit counters 73, 74 and 75.

THR_D(0:11) 76, the 12 bit digital output of the

threshold counter 72, is latched in 12 bit latch 77 whose output is used as the input to the 12 bit digital to analog converter 8 (FIG. 5). The DAC 8 output is converted via a transimpedance amp 7 to provide the analog voltage input (THR_DAC 20) for summing amp 5, which drives the voltage controlled current source 4.

LINEAR OPERATION

Refer now to FIGS. 1 and 4. The 12 bit digital data APC_D(0:11) 78 is input to HI-Z input latch 79. This latched data BUF_AP.C.D(0:11) 80 is converted to the analog signal LIN_DAC 21 by the linear DAC 12 and its transimpedance amp 11.

Linear operation of the laser diode 1 ranges from a minimum power at threshold to a maximum power.

LASER AT THRESHOLD 22 AND LASER OVERPOWER DETECTOR 15

Refer now to FIG. 1 and 8. A high speed comparator 81, such as an Elantec EL2252 component, is used to compare the APC_FEEDBACK signal 33 to a reference voltage.

The ~LASER_OVERPOWER signal 23 is asserted (low) when the APC_FEEDBACK signal 33 equals or exceeds, for example, 4.85 volts which corresponds to a laser power of 4.85 mW. The assertion of ~LASER_OVERPOWER 23 is used to place the crowbar switch 14 shunt across the laser diode 1 and protect it from exceeding the maximum power of 5.0 mW, for example.

The ~LASER_AT_THR signal 22 is asserted (low) when the APC_FEEDBACK signal 33, with a gain of +6 realized by the amplifier 82, equals or exceeds 3.0 volts which corresponds to a laser power of 0.5 mW. When asserted ~LASER_AT_THR 22 stops the threshold clock 70 and counter 72 circuits and the last value of the counter 72 is latched into the THRESHOLD DAC 8 to hold the laser diode 1 at the threshold power.

LASER TEMPERATURE MONITOR 15

Refer to FIGS. 1 and 9. In FIG. 9, amplifier 85 is used to amplify the difference between a thermistor 3 resistance and resistor 86, a reference resistor. This generates an error voltage which is used to drive a thermoelectric cooler (TEC) 87 which either heats or cools the laser diode 1. Laser temperature monitor 15 (FIG. 1) includes operational op amps 88 and 89 and associated circuitry which act as a window comparator to determine if the laser diode 1 is above a temperature of 25°C or below a temperature of 25°C and assert the appropriate signal ~LASER_UNDERTEMP 90 or ~LASER_OVERTEMP 91. Either of these signals 90,91 can apply the crowbar switch 14 to the laser diode 1 to prevent thermal damage. A faulty connection causing an open circuit to a negative temperature coefficient

thermistor 3 can appear to be an under temperature condition and cause the TEC 87 (FIG. 9) to apply maximum heat to the laser diode 1. This can reduce the efficiency of the back facet photodiode 2 and cause the laser power servo-loop to overdrive the laser diode 1. In the other condition, where a thermistor 3 is shorted, the laser diode 1 can be cooled to the point where condensation forms on the laser diode 1, causing optical contamination.

POWER SEQUENCER

Refer to FIGS. 1 and 10. FIG. 10 shows the power sequencer 130 which has the purpose of monitoring the incoming positive voltage SW_P15V 92 and negative voltage SW_N15V 93, which are respectively plus and minus 15 volts to determine that they are within two volts of summing to a total voltage drop of 30 volts before applying power to the laser drive circuitry. For purpose of explanation, only the top half of the power sequencer circuitry for the positive 12 volts VDD will be described. The bottom half is a mirror image (except for comparable diodes 98 and 104 for the negative 12 volt supply VBB. The signals 92,93 are filtered by filters 94,95 before application to power sequencer 130.

The means of monitoring the power is by using a 28 volt zener diode 96 to drop at least 28 volts $\pm 1\%$ between ± 15 volts, so that the base to emitter voltage for transistor 97 is great enough to turn on the transistor 97 only when the supplies have nearly reached ± 15 volts. Diode 98 is used in the VDD circuit, but not the VBB circuit to insure that VDD does not come on while VBB has come on due to the 1% tolerance in the zener diodes 96,96'. When transistor 97 is turned on, it draws current through resistors 99,100 into its collector. This drops enough voltage across resistor 99 to turn on transistor 101. A time delay is built in by the time constant of resistor 102 and capacitor 103. This allows a 12 second delay after ± 15 volts have stabilized before VDD comes up. If, during this delay, the power supplies drop, diode 104 provides a path to discharge capacitor 103 rapidly to start the time delay over.

The power sequence for VBB has a time constant one tenth of that of VDD, so that VBB comes on first, and then VDD. The laser protection circuits are energized by VBB, which is why this power comes up first.

FIG. 7 shows the Back Facet Photodiode 2 transimpedance amp 6. as shown, the signal PHOTO DIODE-105 from photodiode 2 and a negative reference signal N_8.1V REF-106 are applied respectively to op amps 107 and 108 connected in parallel. The outputs of op amps 107 and 108 are input to op amp 109, the output of which is the APC FEEDBACK signal. This signal, as an example, has an output of 1 VOLT/m W of laser power.

The invention finds application in laser imaging systems such as laser diode printers.

Claims

1. A laser imaging apparatus comprising a laser diode (1) for producing a laser light output and a laser diode protection circuit connected in parallel to said laser diode, **characterized by**

field effect transistor shunt circuit means (14) for shunting power around said laser diode (1); an electrical power supply for supplying a positive power supply voltage (V_{DD}) to operate said laser diode (1) and a negative power supply voltage (V_{BB}) to operate said shunt circuit means (14); a power sequencing circuit (130) which turns on said negative power supply voltage (V_{BB}) prior to said positive power supply voltage (V_{DD}), so that said shunt circuit means (14) is operational before said laser diode, and which turns off said positive power supply voltage (V_{DD}) before said negative power supply voltage (V_{BB}), so that said shunt circuit (14) is operational after said laser diode (1); power supply monitor means (16) for monitoring the positive power supply voltage (V_{DD}) supplied to said laser diode (1); and control means (45) for controlling said shunt circuit means (14) to shunt power around said laser diode (1) in response to said power supply monitor means (16) for a predetermined period of time when said positive power supply voltage (V_{DD}) comes on, to protect said laser diode (1) from power-on transients, and when said positive power supply voltage (V_{DD}) drops below a preset voltage when said positive power supply voltage (V_{DD}) goes off, to protect said laser diode (1) from power-down transients.
2. The laser imaging apparatus of claim 1 wherein said control means (45) controls said shunt circuit means (14) to shunt power around said laser diode when said positive power supply voltage (V_{DD}) monitored by said power supply monitor means (16) is below or above predetermined voltage values.
3. The laser imaging apparatus of claim 1, further comprising laser light power monitor means (13) for monitoring the laser light output of said laser diode (1) and thermal monitor means (15) for monitoring the temperature of said laser diode (1), and wherein said control means (45) also controls said shunt circuit means (14) to shunt power around said laser diode when the laser light output monitored by said laser light power monitor means (13) is over a predetermined maximum value and/or when the temperature of the laser diode monitored by said thermal monitor means (15) is above a predetermined maximum value.

Patentansprüche

1. Laser-Bilderzeugungsvorrichtung mit einer Laserdiode (1) zum Erzeugen einer Laserlichtleistung und einer zur Laserdiode parallel geschalteten Schutzschaltung für die Laserdiode, **gekennzeichnet durch**
 - eine Feldeffekttransistor-Nebenschlußkreis-Einrichtung (14), um Strom um die Laserdiode (1) herumzuführen;
 - eine elektrische Stromversorgung zum Liefern einer positiven Versorgungsspannung (V_{DD}), um die Laserdiode zu betreiben, und einer negativen Versorgungsspannung (V_{BB}) für die Speisung der Nebenschlußkreis-Einrichtung (14);
 - eine Ein-/Ausschaltfolgeschaltung (130), welche vor der positiven Versorgungsspannung (V_{DD}) die negative Versorgungsspannung (V_{BB}) einschaltet, so daß die Nebenschlußkreis-Einrichtung (14) vor der Laserdiode arbeitet, und welche vor der negativen Versorgungsspannung (V_{BB}) die positive Versorgungsspannung (V_{BB}) ausschaltet, so daß die Nebenschlußkreis-Einrichtung (14) nach der Laserdiode (1) arbeitet;
 - ein Stromversorgungs-Überwachungsmittel (16) zum Überwachen der an die Laserdiode (1) gelieferten positiven Versorgungsspannung (V_{DD}); und
 - ein Steuermittel (45) zum Steuern der Nebenschlußkreis-Einrichtung (14) zum Herumführen des Stroms um die Laserdiode (1) in Abhängigkeit von dem Stromversorgungs-Überwachungsmittel (16) für eine vorbestimmte Zeitspanne, während des Einschaltvorgangs der positiven Versorgungsspannung (V_{DD}), um die Laserdiode (1) vor Überspannungen zu schützen, und wenn beim Abschalten der positiven Versorgungsspannung (V_{DD}) diese unter eine vorgegebene Spannung abfällt, um die Laserdiode (1) während des Abschaltvorgangs vor Überspannungen zu schützen.
2. Vorrichtung nach Anspruch 1, dadurch gekennzeichnet, daß das Steuermittel (45) die Nebenschlußkreis-Einrichtung (14) zum Herumführen des Stroms um die Laserdiode steuert, wenn die durch das Stromversorgungs-Überwachungsmittel (16) überwachte positive Versorgungsspannung (V_{DD}) unter oder über vorgegebenen Spannungswerten liegt.
3. Vorrichtung nach Anspruch 1, gekennzeichnet durch ein Laserlicht-Stromüberwachungsmittel (13) zum Überwachen der Laserlichtleistung der Laserdiode (1) und ein Temperatur-Überwachungs-

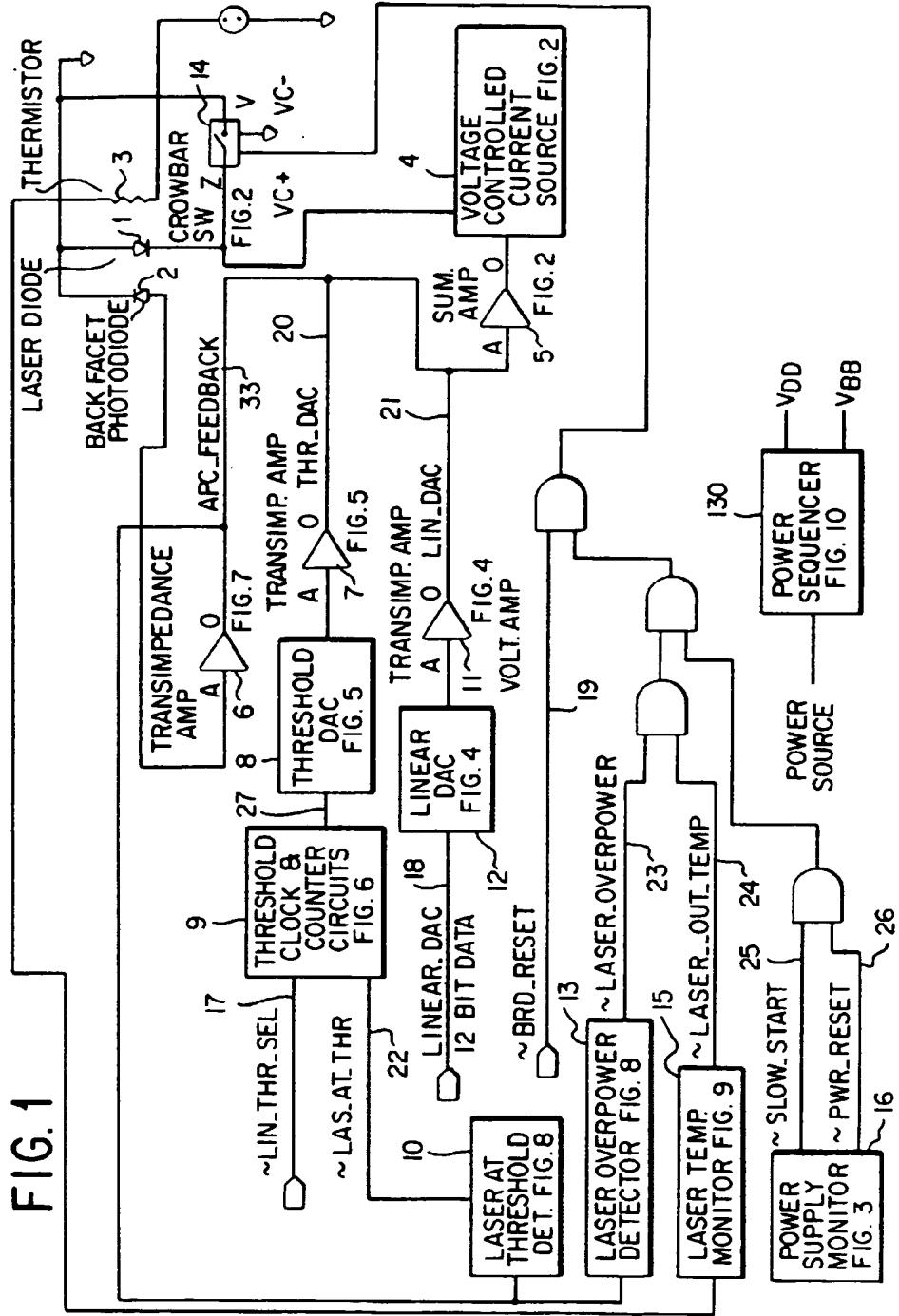
mittel (15) zum Überwachen der Temperatur der Laserdiode (1), und dadurch, daß das Steuermittel (45) auch die Nebenschlußkreis-Einrichtung (14) zum Herumführen des Stroms um die Laserdiode steuert, wenn die durch das Laserlicht-Stromüberwachungsmittel (2, 13) überwachte Laserlichtleistung und/oder die von dem Temperatur-Überwachungsmittel (3, 15) überwachte Temperatur der Laserdiode über einem vorgegebenen Maximalwert liegt.

Revendications

1. Appareil d'imagerie à laser comprenant une diode laser (1) destinée à produire une émission de lumière laser et un circuit de protection de diode laser relié en parallèle avec ladite diode laser, caractérisé par
 - un moyen de circuit de shunt à transistor à effet de champ (14) destiné à shunter l'alimentation en contournant ladite diode laser (1), une alimentation électrique destinée à appliquer une tension d'alimentation positive (V_{DD}) pour mettre en oeuvre ladite diode laser (1) et une tension d'alimentation négative (V_{BB}) pour mettre en oeuvre ledit moyen de circuit de shunt (14),
 - un circuit de séquencement d'alimentation (130) qui active ladite alimentation négative (V_{BB}) avant ladite alimentation positive (V_{DD}), de façon à ce que ledit moyen de circuit de shunt (14) soit fonctionnel avant ladite diode laser, et qui désactive ladite alimentation positive (V_{DD}) avant ladite alimentation négative (V_{BB}), de façon à ce que ledit circuit de shunt (14) soit fonctionnel après ladite diode laser (1),
 - un moyen de surveillance d'alimentation (16) destiné à surveiller la tension d'alimentation positive (V_{DD}) appliquée à ladite diode laser (1), et un moyen de commande (45) destiné à commander ledit moyen de circuit de shunt (14) afin de shunter l'alimentation autour de ladite diode laser (1) en réponse audit moyen de surveillance d'alimentation (16) pendant un intervalle de temps prédéterminé lorsque ladite tension d'alimentation positive (V_{DD}) apparaît, afin de protéger ladite diode laser (1) vis-à-vis de transitoires à la mise sous tension, et lorsque ladite tension d'alimentation positive (V_{DD}) chute en-dessous d'une tension préétablie lorsque ladite tension d'alimentation positive (V_{DD}) disparaît, afin de protéger ladite diode laser (1) vis-à-vis des transitoires de coupure d'alimentation.
2. Appareil d'imagerie à laser selon la revendication 1, dans lequel ledit moyen de commande (45) com-

mande ledit moyen de circuit de shunt (14) afin de shunter l'alimentation en contournant ladite diode laser lorsque ladite tension d'alimentation positive (V_{DD}) surveillée par ledit moyen de surveillance d'alimentation (16) est en-dessous ou au-dessus de valeurs de tension prédéterminées.

3. Appareil d'imagerie à laser selon la revendication 1, comprenant en outre un moyen de surveillance de la puissance lumineuse du laser (3) afin de surveiller l'émission de lumière laser de ladite diode laser (1) et un moyen de surveillance thermique (15) destiné à surveiller la température de ladite diode laser (1), et dans lequel ledit moyen de commande (45) commande également ledit moyen de circuit de shunt (14) afin de shunter l'alimentation en contournant ladite diode laser lorsque l'émission de lumière laser surveillée par ledit moyen de surveillance de puissance de lumière laser (2, 13) est au-dessus d'une valeur maximum prédéterminée et/ou lorsque la température de la diode laser surveillée par ledit moyen de surveillance thermique (3, 15) est au-dessus d'une valeur maximum prédéterminée.



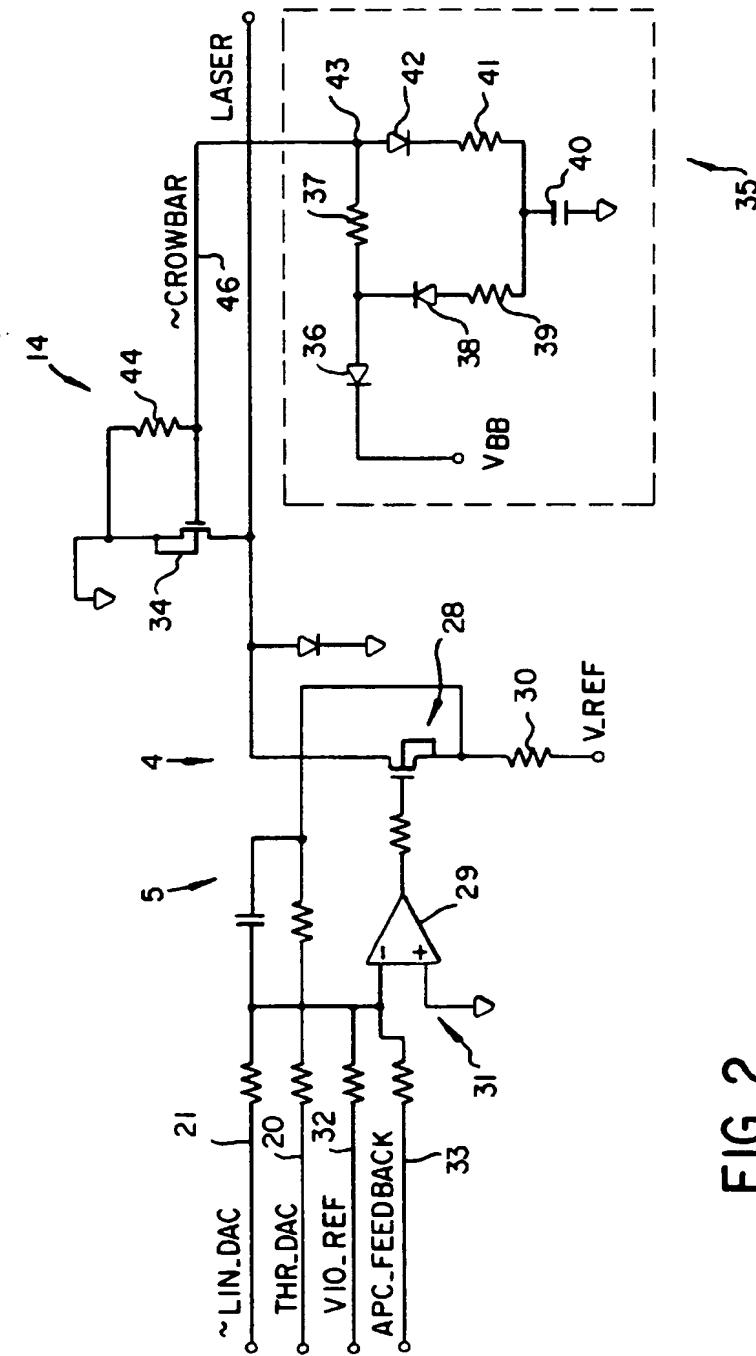
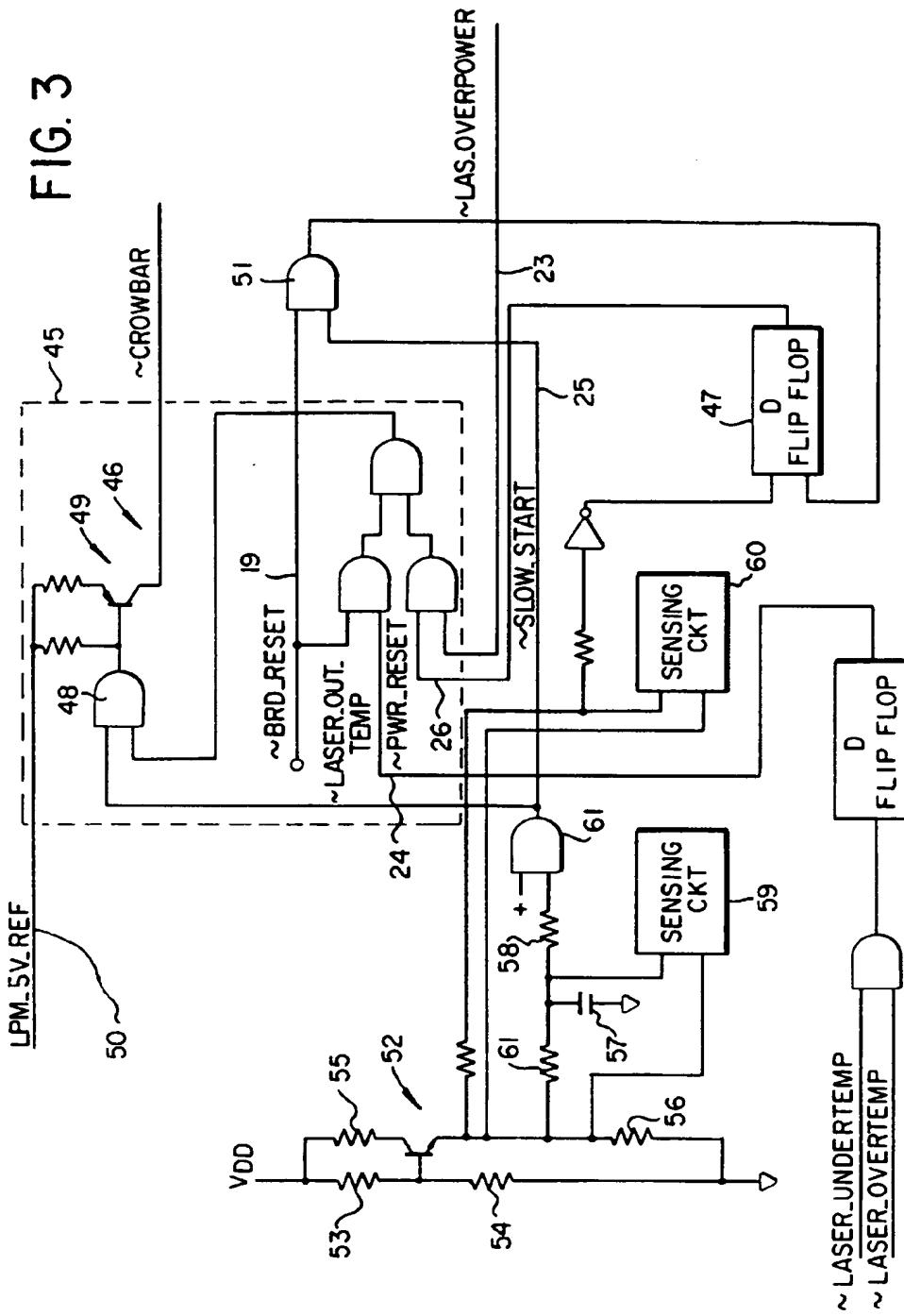


FIG. 2

FIG. 3



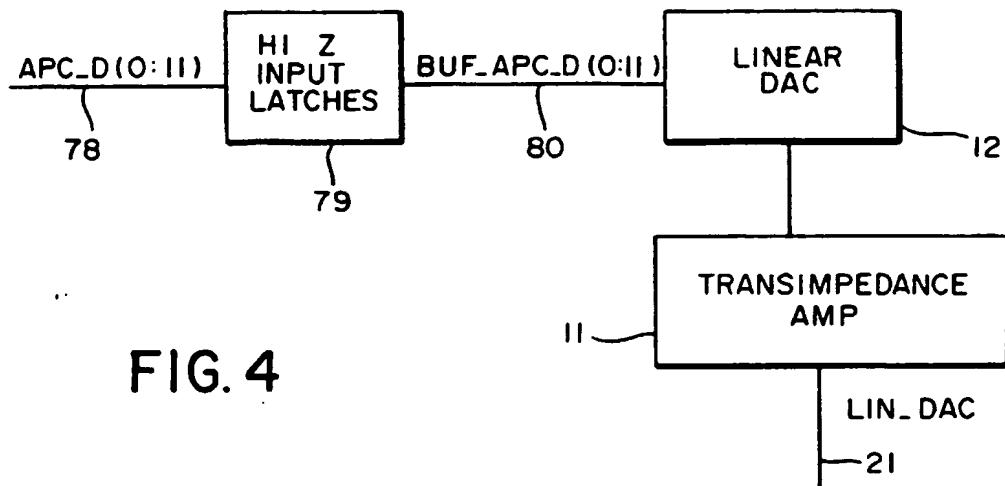


FIG. 4

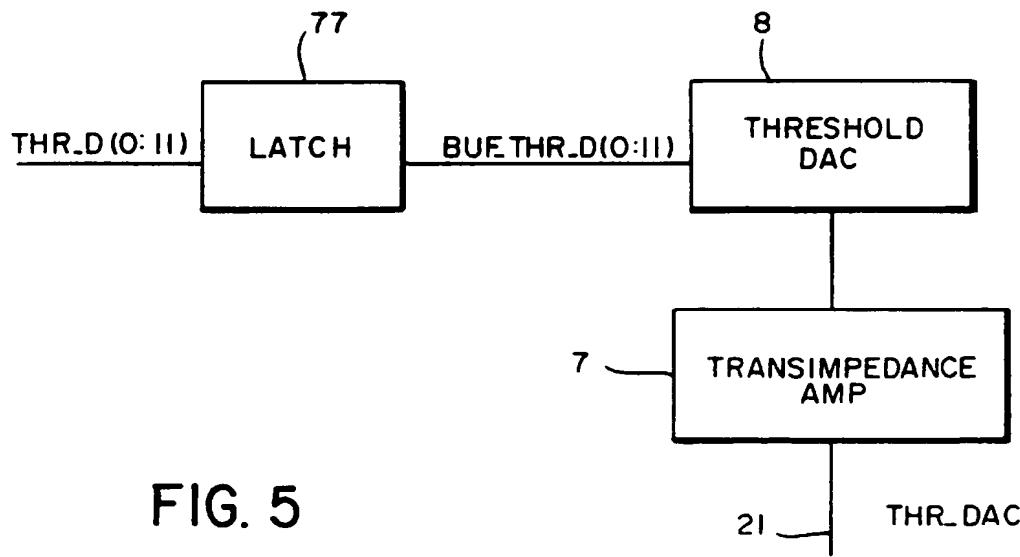


FIG. 5

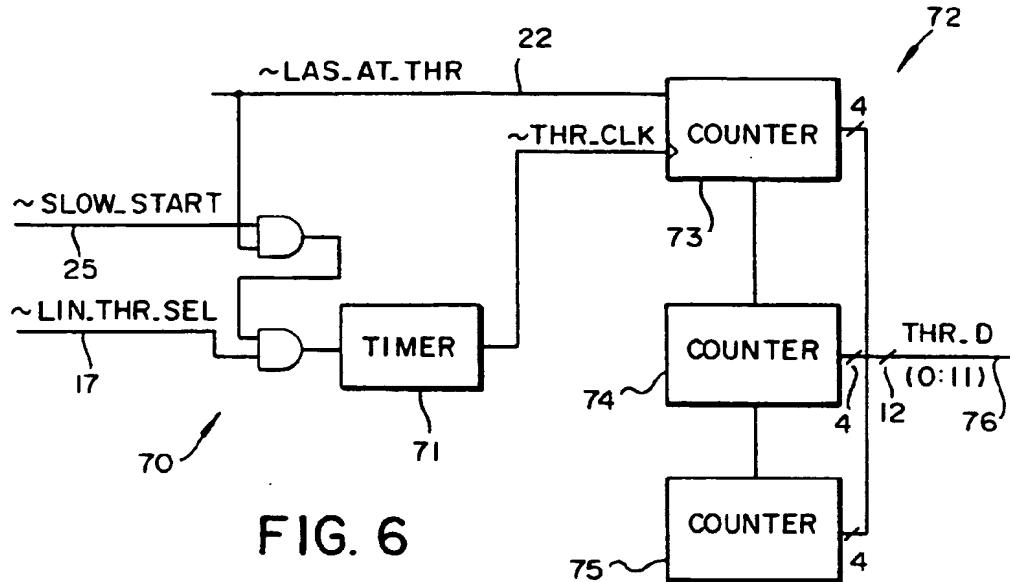


FIG. 6

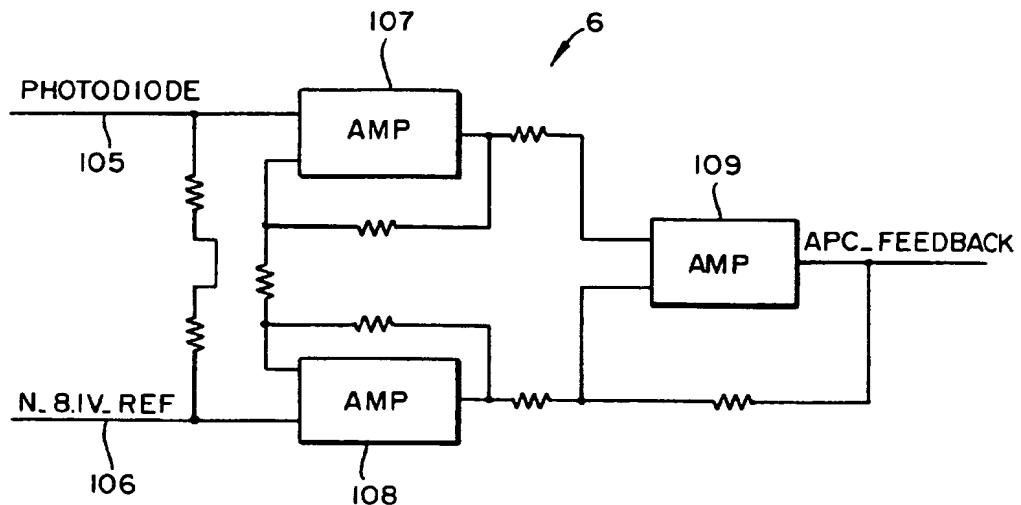


FIG. 7

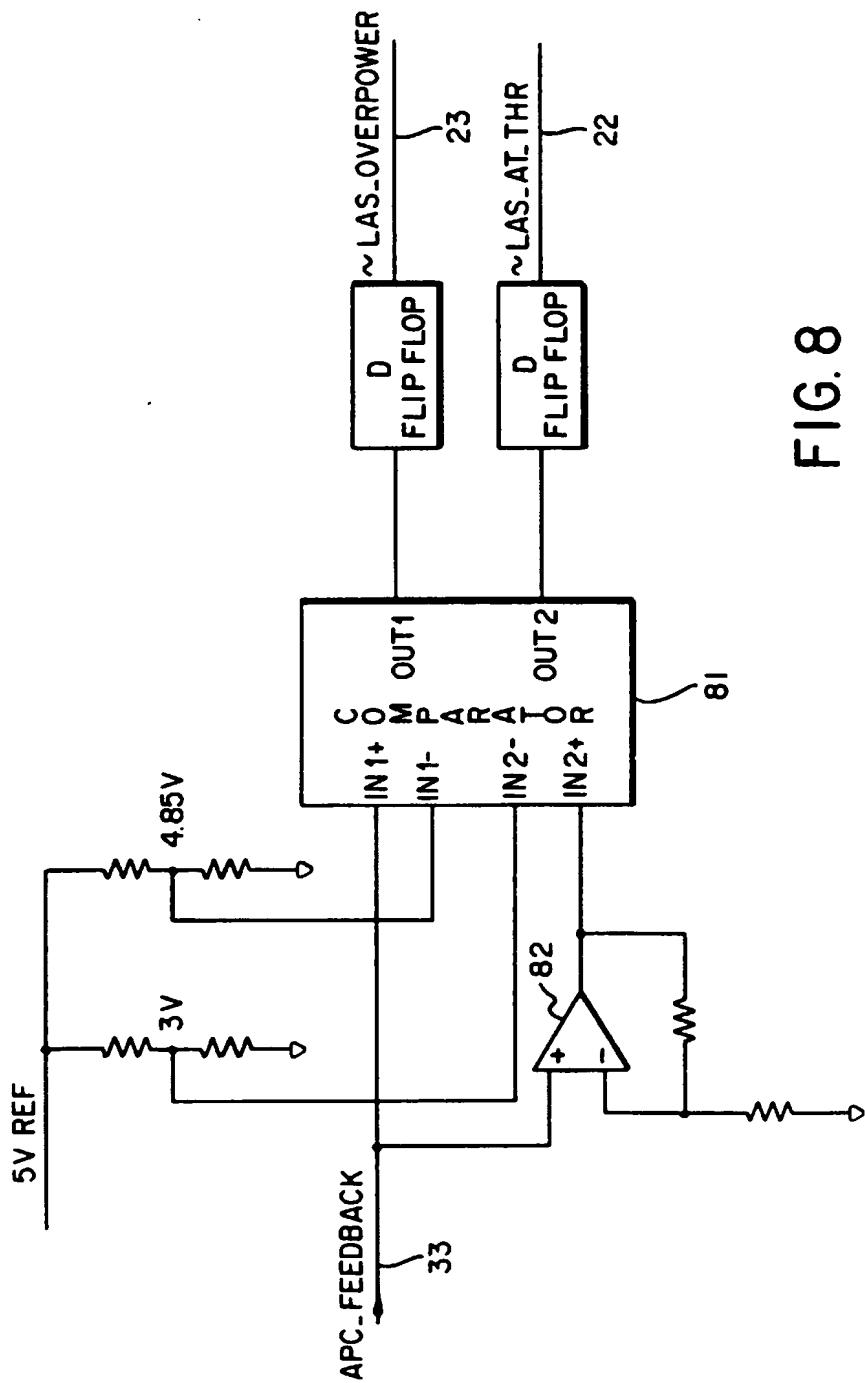


FIG. 8

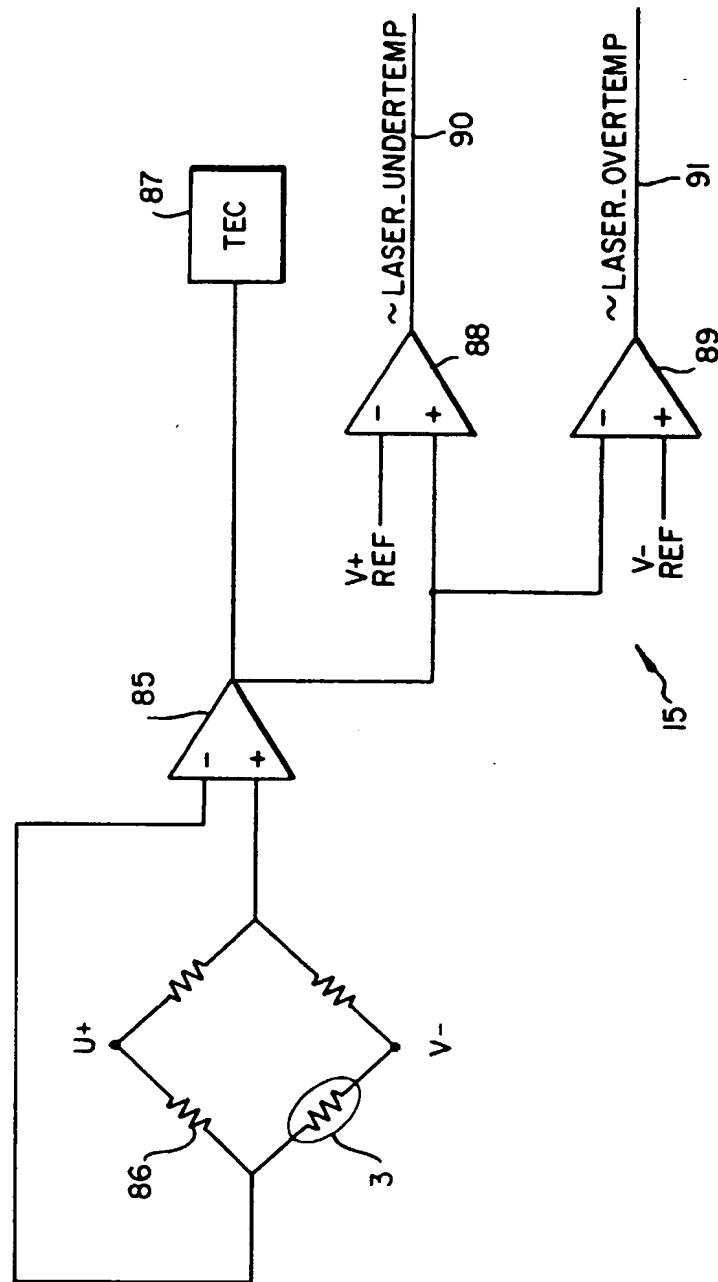


FIG. 9

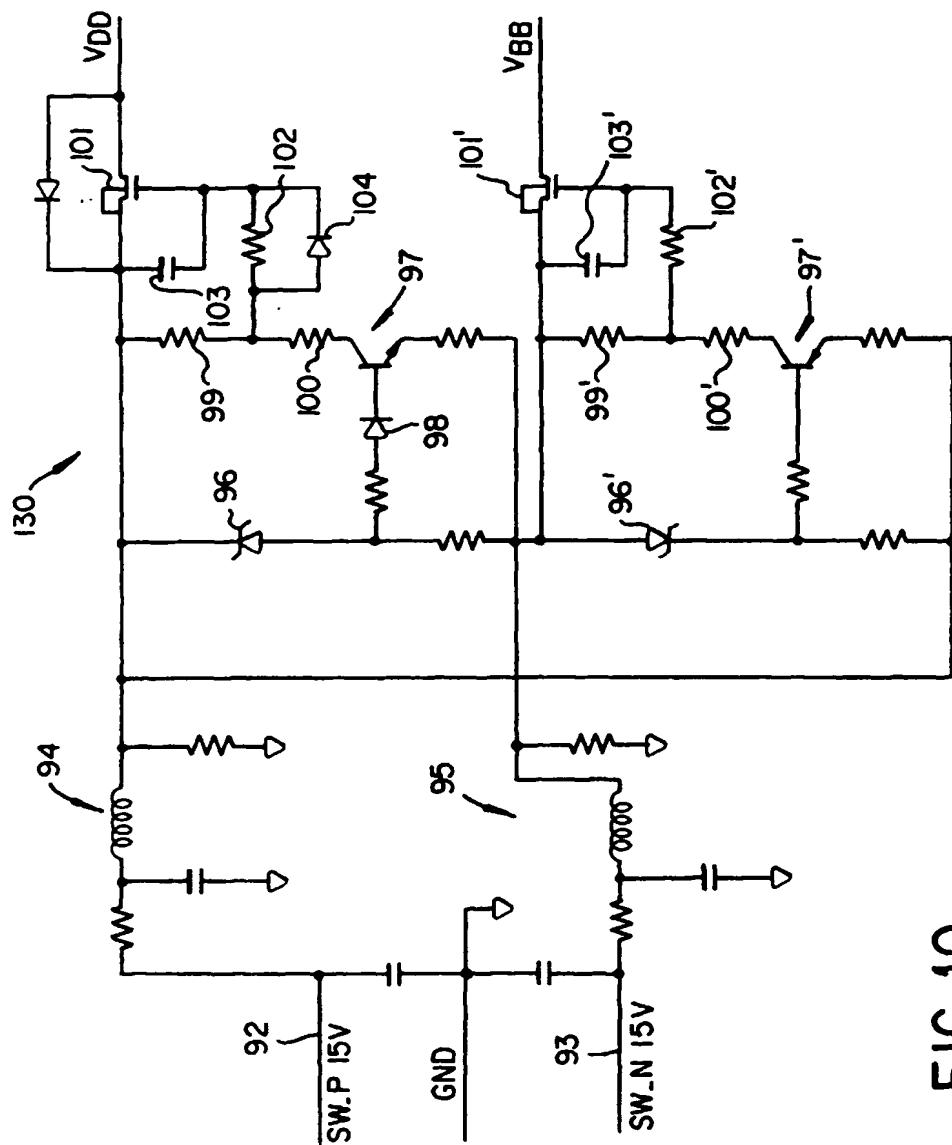


FIG. 10

